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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Seventieth session

Summary record of the 1600th meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 2 July 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Opening of the session

1. **The Chair** declared open the seventieth session of the Committee.

Statement by the United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights

2. **Ms. Gilmore** (United Nations Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights) said that tackling gender inequality was a priority for the Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (OHCHR). Its management plan for the period 2018–2021 would focus on: improving women's health, especially sexual and reproductive health; deepening the understanding of the autonomy of women in both policy and practice; dismantling gender stereotypes, particularly in the judiciary, the media and the education system; and working with civil society organizations to demand accountability for gender-based violence. Furthermore, OHCHR would measure the impact of its actions on three segments of the population on whom a spotlight would be shone, namely women, young people and persons with disabilities.

3. OHCHR would also raise awareness of the demand for human rights and expand rights protection into new areas of concern such as climate change, information technology and migration. Whereas the Millennium Development Goals focused on responding to abject poverty, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized inequality as one of the gravest threats to human rights. Poverty, a consequence of inequality and the active stratification of human society, resulted in the dehumanization of people as manifested by the attacks on migrants, particularly women and girls.

4. In March 2018, the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan had presented its report to the Human Rights Council, the findings of which confirmed the lasting physical and psychological impact of violations on survivors and communities across the country. The report explained how early marriage limited women's opportunities and autonomy and highlighted how sexual violence was used as a weapon of conflict against not only women and girls but also men and boys. The Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic had also presented its report to the Council in March, entitled "'I lost my dignity': Sexual and gender-based violence in the Syrian Arab Republic". It had similarly concluded that all parties to the conflict, especially government forces and associated militias, had used and continued to resort to sexual violence as an effective weapon for instilling fear, causing humiliation and inflicting punishments. In April 2018, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict had briefed the Security Council on the annual report of the Secretary-General on conflict-related sexual violence (S/2018/250) during its open debate on women and peace and security. The report had listed, for the first time, the armed forces of Myanmar among those suspected of committing sexual violence in armed conflicts.

5. A panel on violence against women human rights defenders at the Human Rights Council annual full-day meeting to discuss the human rights of women had addressed the additional risks posed by the digital space, including threats of rape, dissemination of intimate data and images, and cyberstalking on the part of authorities, faith groups and the wider public. A second panel had discussed how best to advance women's rights in the economic sphere through access to and participation in information and communication technologies. In spite of risks of online violence, digital technology provided significant opportunities for women by allowing them to overcome physical barriers to education, empowering women entrepreneurs and facilitating access to services that they would otherwise be denied, including sexual and reproductive health services. Nonetheless, the Council had been informed of a significant gender gap in terms of access to digital tools, which constituted one of the gravest threats to women's literacy, education and public participation. It was clear, therefore, that women's rights must be expanded and integrated into information technology to prevent inequality.

6. With regard to the aforementioned issues, a number of draft resolutions were currently before the Council. The first concerned the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, with a special focus on economic empowerment and

combating sexual harassment. It welcomed the work undertaken by the International Labour Organization towards the development of a convention and a recommendation on violence and harassment in the workplace. A further two draft resolutions sought to accelerate the elimination of violence within the digital context and to protect and promote human rights on the Internet, by engaging with all parties concerned, particularly women and boys, and calling on States to bridge the gender divide. The resolution on human rights and climate change recognized that women were not only victims of such change but also important actors in combating it and called for a greater participation of women in response efforts. While that resolution referred to the Convention and the Committee's statement on gender and climate change of 2009, it made no mention of general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the gender-related dimensions of disaster risk reduction in the context of climate change.

7. **Ms. Haidar** said that she found it frustrating that the draft resolution of the Council did not refer to the general recommendation. It would be helpful to have an insight into the politics behind that omission, especially since the topic of climate change was relatively uncontroversial.

8. **Ms. Ameline** said that information technology, in spite of its risks, presented an unprecedented opportunity and constituted an extremely useful tool in the advancement of women's rights. It was also very important to empower women and to encourage them to become leaders in the political and economic spheres, in addition to protecting their rights. From what she had seen on her visits, Member States were committed to shifting the paradigm in favour of women and to ensuring that women played a key role in that shift, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Nonetheless, greater urgency was required since only 12 years remained in which to fulfil the Goals and to reverse the negative developments.

9. **Ms. Gabr** said that she had been heartened by the encouraging introductory statement made and hoped that the Deputy High Commissioner would be able to find some time to meet with the Committee yet again to discuss a road map and the priorities for the future.

10. **Ms. Gilmore** said that it would not be appropriate for her to comment on the negotiations on climate change currently under way at the Council. However, on a more general note, a distinction should be made between what was popular and what was right. She encouraged the Committee to remain committed to future generations and to doing what was right, even if its actions were unpopular. It was important to have a clear way forward in new areas such as climate change and information technology. One advantage of covering new ground was the freedom to set the narrative, and the visionary general recommendation No. 37 had done exactly that. Moreover, encouraging the involvement of women in the fields of science, engineering and mathematics was essential. If women did not play a part in developing new technologies, then the problem of inequality would be even greater going forward.

11. The commitment of the Secretary-General to gender parity reinforced the notion that those occupying leadership positions should reflect the realities of the people whom they led. Highlighting the pressing need for the principle of inclusion in the current political climate, she said that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was one of the most effective tools with which to combat populism and the politics of hate. Ensuring that no one was left behind meant addressing not just material poverty but also tackling prejudice, exclusion and persecution. Furthermore, in order to implement the Sustainable Development Goals fully, all parties had to be held accountable, regardless of the country's state of development or politics. She would be happy to hold an informal dialogue with the Committee to establish a road map for the Committee's future work.

Solemn declaration by new and re-elected members of the Committee

12. *Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia made the solemn declaration provided for in rule 15 of the Committee's rules of procedure.*

Adoption of the agenda and organization of work (CEDAW/C/70/1)

13. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report of the Chair on activities undertaken between the sixty-ninth and seventieth sessions of the Committee

14. **The Chair**, welcoming Ms. Eghobamien-Mshelia to the Committee, said that, since the previous session, the number of States parties that had ratified or acceded to the Convention had remained at 189. The number of States parties that had accepted the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention concerning the Committee's meeting time had remained at 72, while a total of 126 States parties were currently required to accept the amendment to bring it into force. The number of States parties to the Optional Protocol had remained at 109. Ten States parties — Andorra, Bahrain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Côte d'Ivoire, Guyana, Kazakhstan, Mozambique, Seychelles and Zimbabwe — had submitted periodic reports since the opening of the previous session. Mauritius had submitted its eighth periodic report under the simplified reporting procedure. Following the Committee's decision to reinstate the simplified reporting procedure, 14 States parties had indicated their wish to avail themselves of that procedure.

15. In March 2018, she had participated in the opening of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York and in a consultation organized by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women regarding cooperation between international and regional mechanisms on violence against women. In that context, she had been on the high-level panel for cooperation between global and regional independent mechanisms on violence and discrimination against women. She had participated in three side events where she had made presentations: on the Committee's practices to combat violence against women in politics; on research on violence against women for policy formulation; and on the Committee's general recommendation No. 37 (2018).

16. On 23 and 24 May in New York, she had participated in a workshop on human rights defenders, organized by OHCHR and the International Service for Human Rights, in which she had highlighted the Committee's recognition of women human rights defenders in its concluding observations. She had attended the 2018 meeting of the Chairs of the human rights treaty bodies. On 8 June 2018, she had moderated a session at the Women Political Leaders summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. From 9 to 11 June 2018, she had delivered a keynote address entitled "Global women's rights and local anti-genderism", and three lectures at the Venice School of Human Rights concerning women and peace and security, the Optional Protocol to the Convention and other issues. At her initiative, in late June she and three other Committee members had participated in a workshop concerning trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration to define the main points for the concept note for the Committee's draft general recommendation on trafficking in women and girls. Lastly, she had attended, along with Ms. Hofmeister, an informal meeting about women's and girls' rights in Eastern Europe, which had been attended by legal experts from Austria.

17. **Ms. Hayashi** said that she had attended the 2018 Group of Seven (G7) summit in Canada and participated in a preparatory meeting as a member of the Gender Equality Advisory Council established under the current G7 presidency of Canada. For the first time, gender equality and women's empowerment had been included in the G7 agenda and dealt with as cross-cutting and stand-alone themes in G7 documents. The leaders at the summit had expressed appreciation for the Committee's work but there had also been a trace of cynicism among some. The Committee should have further opportunities to work with the Council under the presidency of France in 2019 to strengthen the coordination between the United Nations and the G7.

18 **Ms. Rana** said that, in March 2018, in the framework of the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women, she had participated in Inter-Parliamentary Union meetings regarding rural women and girls, and gender and youth quotas, and sessions relating to discrimination and the impact of climate change on rural women and girls. She had also been a panellist at a side event organized by the United Nations Development Programme concerning women's right to information. On 24 March 2018, she had spoken

at the Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union on women's underrepresentation in politics. In April 2018, she had attended the Women and Peace and Security Focal Points Network meeting in Germany, focusing on building alliances to advance the agenda of the Commission on the Status of Women and underlining the importance of the Convention to strengthen national accountability. On 18 May, she had participated in the regional consultation on women's labour rights organized by International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific in Nepal. Later in May, she had attended the conference entitled "Vienna +25: Building Trust — Making Human Rights a Reality for All". Lastly, on 25 June, she had been a panellist at the conference regarding the national action plan of Ukraine on Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

19. **Ms. Narain** said that in mid-April she had attended the Stockholm Forum on Gender Equality, where, at the invitation of the World Bank, she had participated in a panel discussion on women, business and the law. At the invitation of UN-Women, she had also attended the Feminist Think Space, where she had participated in group discussions on sexual harassment, domestic and gender-based violence. In May 2018, in Mauritius, she had made a presentation on women's rights, business and the law, where she had discussed the work of the Committee.

20. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that in March 2018 she had participated in an event, along with Ms. Acar and the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, convened by UN-Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, regarding violence against women in politics, in which she had presented the Committee's jurisprudence on that subject. The Committee should discuss in plenary how it envisaged addressing that issue going forward. In late June, she had spoken at the invitation of Femmes for Freedom at the European Parliament on the issue of marital captivity.

21. **Ms. Acar** said that she had participated in the workshop on violence against women in politics at the previous session of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York in her capacity as President of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, which monitored the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention). In May, she had moderated and participated in a discussion in Ankara that described Ms. Helen Clark's run for the position of Secretary-General of the United Nations. In late May, she had participated in a UN-Women regional office training session in Ankara, where she had introduced general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19.

22. **Ms. Acosta Vargas** said that, in March 2018, at the invitation of the International Indigenous Women's Forum, she had participated in a side event of the session of the Commission on the Status of Women concerning the rights of indigenous women under the Convention. In May 2018, she had spoken at an international conference on women, gender and the law in Havana, Cuba, on the future of the Committee. Also in May, at the international conference of the Latin American Studies Association in Barcelona, she had spoken about the role of women during the transitional period in Cuba. On 5 June, in Lima, Peru, she had taken part in a training session for lawyers regarding the importance of the Convention as a means of combating discrimination against women, organized by the Latin American and Caribbean Committee for the Defence of Women's Rights. She had given a class on gender and human rights at the University of Geneva on 26 June 2018.

23. **Ms. Ameline** said that she had organized a side event of the session of the Commission on the Status of Women on the relationship between the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention and the role of the private sector. A meeting had been held with a pilot group composed of international enterprises which had committed to systematically incorporating women's rights into their business strategies. She had also led events, in Morocco, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, to promote the Convention and gender equality in career development.

24. **Ms. Arocha Dominguez** said that owing to ill health she had not been able to accept several invitations to speak at conferences. She had, however, participated in the international conference on women, gender and the law in Havana, speaking at the high-

level meeting and the closing keynote address on the Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention.

25. **Ms. Gabr** said that she had spoken at various side events of the session of the Commission on the Status of Women on rural women and general recommendation No. 34. She had also attended several meetings in Egypt organized by the National Women's Council, the meeting in Venice on trafficking in women and girls in the context of global migration and meetings organized by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in Burkina Faso to prepare for its seventh ministerial conference.

26. **Ms. Haidar** said that in March she had participated in a meeting, the co-organizers of which included UN-Women, to discuss outreach on gender issues in the Middle East and North Africa regions. She had been involved in discussions on the Human Rights Council relating to general recommendation No. 37 (2018), including an expert meeting on the Sustainable Development Goals, gender and women's rights, and strengthening the links between the Sustainable Development Goals and States parties' reports. In May, she had participated in a meeting in Copenhagen on human rights and gender, in training sessions of the Geneva Academy and the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights and in the International Organization of la Francophonie meeting in Paris on the universality and indivisibility of human rights, and their gender dimensions. In June, she had attended an expert meeting with the Geneva Academy to discuss economic, social and cultural rights and sustainable development, the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals voluntary national review of Lebanon and the Women Political Leaders summit in Vilnius.

27. **Ms. Bethel** said that she had attended the Caribbean Studies Association annual conference in Havana, where she had spoken about issues related to the Committee. She had participated in a consultation on corruption and human rights, organized by OHCHR, the Centre for Civil and Political Rights and the Geneva Academy, to discuss how non-governmental organizations might support the work of the Committee. She had also attended a meeting at the invitation of the Government of the Bahamas ahead of the consideration of its country report in October 2018.

28. **Ms. Schulz** said that in March 2018 she had attended an event in Paris on women's rights; in April she had taken part in a panel discussion organized by the International Commission of Jurists on the theme "The end of the rule of law?"; and in May she had been a panellist in a side event of the twenty-seventh session of the Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice organized by International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific on leveraging judicial actions to combat sexual violence. She had also been involved in human rights programmes organized by the Graduate Institute of Geneva and the University of Geneva, where she had presented the work of the Committee, and programmes of Swiss non-governmental organizations. In June, she had taken part in two training sessions for human rights defenders, organized by the International Service for Human Rights and the International Commission of Jurists respectively.

29. **Ms. Verges** said that in March she had spoken at an event within the framework of International Women's Day on the role of the international organizations to combat violence. In May, she had participated in a regional conference of the Sahel Women's Empowerment and Demographic Dividend Project on the role of religious networks for women's and youth empowerment. She had helped launch an awareness-raising campaign on the hepatitis B virus. In June, she had been involved in a high-level group of the Economic Commission for Africa, whose objective had been to consult civil society on the future of the Sahel region and raise issues of women's inequality.

30. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that, in March 2018, she had participated in a joint thematic dialogue on sexual orientation, gender identity and intersex characteristics led by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. In May 2018, she had been nominated to a high-level working group on justice for women, supported by UN-Women, among others, whose purpose was to discuss justice for women in the context of Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions. The Committee's general recommendation No. 33 (2015) on women's access to justice had informed the outcome document of the group.

31. **Ms. Manalo** said that she continued to advocate for human rights, particularly the rights of women, children and persons with disabilities, notwithstanding the obstacles to doing so in a political setting of misogyny and the persecution of strong women leaders. A political leader in the Asia Pacific region had nevertheless informed her country's President that her services were needed to tackle sensitive women's rights issues, and she had yet to be asked formally and take a decision in that regard. She had participated in a meeting of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations on how the Convention contributed to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality. She had spoken about the importance of bridging the gender gap in science and mathematics and other school subjects, including the humanities, and about the risks and limitations of artificial intelligence to guarantee human rights. She continued to advise relevant non-governmental organizations on Sustainable Development Goal 5 and its relation to the Convention and on certain general recommendations.

32. **Ms. Song** said that in April 2018 she had attended a workshop in Beijing, which had been attended by government leaders and civil society organizations, where she had spoken about the Convention. She had attended the Women Political Leaders summit in Vilnius, where young girls' leadership had been high on the agenda.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

33. **Ms. Ameline**, introducing the report of the Chair of the pre-sessional working group for the seventieth session, said that the group had met from 20 to 24 November 2017 in Geneva to draw up lists of issues and questions concerning the periodic or initial reports of Australia, the Cook Islands, Cyprus, Mexico, New Zealand, the State of Palestine and Turkmenistan. In addition, the Committee, piloting its simplified reporting procedure, had prepared a list of issues prior to the submission of the eighth periodic report of Bulgaria. The consideration of that report was scheduled to take place at the Committee's seventy-second session.

34. The reports of the States parties mentioned above, with the exception of Bulgaria, along with the core documents of all but the State of Palestine, had informed the preparation of the lists of issues and the questions. The working group had also drawn on the Committee's general recommendations, information and draft lists of issues provided by the secretariat and, except in the case of the State of Palestine, which had submitted its initial report, information provided by States parties in follow-up to the Committee's concluding observations on their previous reports. The group had received written and oral information from entities and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and national human rights institutions. The final lists of issues and questions had been transmitted to the States parties concerned.

Follow-up to the consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention

35. **Ms. Gbedemah** (Rapporteur on follow-up), briefing the Committee on follow-up reports received from States parties, said that, during the sixty-ninth session, she and Ms. Nadaraia had met with representatives of Azerbaijan, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana and Uganda, whose responses had been positive. At the end of that session, follow-up letters outlining the assessment of follow-up reports had been sent to the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Croatia, Maldives, Mauritania, Namibia, Poland, Portugal and Uzbekistan.

36. First reminders about overdue follow-up reports had been sent to Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, the Russian Federation, Timor-Leste and the United Arab Emirates. The Committee had received follow-up reports from Eritrea with a 12-month delay, Kyrgyzstan with an 11-month delay, Slovakia with a 1-month delay, Uganda with a 37-month delay, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela with a 12-month delay, Viet Nam with a 6-month delay, and Czechia and Sweden on time. The country rapporteurs for Czechia, Kyrgyzstan and Sweden were invited to assist in the assessment of the follow-up reports. She would assist in the assessment of Eritrea. Volunteers were sought to assist in the assessment of the reports submitted by Slovakia, Uganda, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Viet Nam.

37. During the current session, first reminders should be sent to Haiti, Iceland, Mongolia and the United Republic of Tanzania. Second reminders should be sent to Lebanon, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Timor-Leste and the United Arab Emirates. In addition, meetings regarding overdue follow-up reports should be scheduled with representatives of the Gambia, Guinea, India, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal and Tuvalu.

The meeting rose at 11.40 a.m.